

Washington Post  
Interview with Linda Stasi

Linda Stasi: Hello?

Interviewer [Male]: Hey, Linda.

Linda Stasi: Yes, hello.

Interviewer: How are you doing?

Linda Stasi: Hi, how are you?

Interviewer: Just good. Does now still work?

Linda Stasi: I'm sorry?

Interviewer: Are you still available to talk now?

Linda Stasi: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Well, thanks for making the time on vacation.

Linda Stasi: Sure.

Interviewer: First up, you mind if I record this for note-taking purposes?

Linda Stasi: No. That's fine.

Interviewer: How's the weather?

Linda Stasi: I'm sorry. I have a bit of a sore throat.

Interviewer: How's the weather in Punta Cana today?

Linda Stasi: It's always perfect in paradise. It's very nice. It rains at night. That's it. It rains for 20 minutes during the day and that's it.

Interviewer: Basically, what we're working on is we're trying to put together a biographical book about Donald between now and the convention, sort of a team of us writing various chapters for the two lead writers. One of the chapters I'm working on is "Tabloid Donald," talking about his media strategy.

Linda Stasi: Is there anything else?

Interviewer: Pardon?

Linda Stasi: Does he exist other than that?

Interviewer: Yeah. I mean he does. My other chapter is "Sporting Donald," so talking about his USFL days and boxing promotion, golf courses, all that jazz. I actually spent the weekend or I spent a Saturday in the Library of Congress going through the *Post* and *Daily News* coverage of when Donald and Ivana's marriage broke up, which was hilarious reading. It was something like seven straight days he was on the front page of the *Post* and the *Daily News*.

Linda Stasi: Something like that.

Interviewer: Anyway, I guess first off, when did your career start covering Donald?

Linda Stasi: When my career in newspaper started, it was almost an immediate thing. I don't remember a time that I had a career in journalism that it didn't involve Donald Trump. It's bizarre because when I started, he was gossip fodder. And I was

a gossip columnist. Then I became a TV reviewer, and he became a reality star. Then I became a political columnist and he went into politics. I don't know if we've been tied together in some former life or I'm cursed or what.

Interviewer: I was unable to find like a full sort of CV or LinkedIn page for you. When did you actually start?

Linda Stasi: I think in 1990, I got a job at *New York News Day*.

Interviewer: I mean, just what's your first memory, first assignment, first story related to Trump where you were actually dealing with him?

Linda Stasi: I kind of missed out on the divorce thing. I was doing gossip at that time so I was writing some stuff that he found unflattering. A mutual friend kind of connected us so that we could kind of make peace. I remember I had written something like I'd seen Donald out and it looked like he'd had a couple of sandwiches. He was really upset because it meant he was gaining weight. So we had a sit-down in his office. Then he started feeding me information. Then he actually introduced me to Marla. Then he gave me this story when he got engaged to Marla. That was actually my first front page of a tabloid with "Marla's got the ring."

Interviewer: That was for *News Day*?

Linda Stasi: That was for *New York News Day*, yes.

Interviewer: Were you a gossip columnist at that point?

Linda Stasi: Yeah. I was a gossip columnist at that point.

Interviewer: You mentioned that Trump feeding you stuff. What's an example of a Trump tip or information? How was he useful of a source?

Linda Stasi: Well, I mean he'd give me a lot of information about himself. I mean, it was never about other stuff. I remember one time, my brother came up to the newsroom. My brother is a scientist and he came up to the newsroom. We were going out to lunch. We had come back for lunch and I hit my messages. A voice came on saying, "Donald Trump was spotted at somewhere or other with models." My brother said, "Wow, listen to that." I said, "No, it's Donald Trump disguising his voice."

Interviewer: What happened then?

Linda Stasi: My brother reminded me of that story the other day because I'd completely forgotten about it.

Then the time came when Marla had the baby. Well, I was at the *Daily News* at that time. My boss said to me, "Listen, you've got to go to the hospital and see that baby." I said, "It's not even born yet. I can't do that. He's in Florida. I can't do that. This is a private time." He turned to me. He was half kidding around. He said, "Well, then you're fired." I

said, "Well, okay. Then I'll do that." So I called Donald and I told him. I said, "I have to come." He said, "No. You can't do that." I said, "No. I have to. I might be fired." He said, "All right." So I got on the plane. I went to Florida. He actually let me into the room. Marla was like really upset as I would be. I mean I'd kill the guy. They gave me an interview. It was so bizarre.

Interviewer: How many hours after birth-giving that was?

Linda Stasi: About one hour maybe. It's a baby. I brought a photographer with me. Then she said, "No. That's too much. You cannot do that." We walked outside. Donald held an empty blanket. He said, "Do you want to just take a picture of me with the blanket?" "No, I don't think so."

Interviewer: Obviously, that's [indiscernible] timeline for that. That was when Tiffany was born. Were there any other journalists down there at that point? It's just you?

Linda Stasi: I don't remember, but I was the only one that went to the hospital. I was the only one in the room. I was the only one at the hospital. After she was born, I know - I just looked it up - I had the library get up the clips because there weren't -- it was a nexus [sounds like] then. So I had the library get up the clips. The next story I wrote, there were other journalists there outside the hospital. But they

weren't then. I know I was the only one that was in that hospital.

Interviewer: I'm wondering. Were there any sort of descriptive elements to that scene that come to memory? Like, was Donald in a suit? Was he dressed casually for the --?

Linda Stasi: Yes. He's always in a suit.

Interviewer: Always in a suit. People talk that he's always wearing a red tie. But then I read that piece in the *Times* that Sue Carswell said she would send him pink Hermes ties. Was there a particular getup he was fond of?

Linda Stasi: I have no idea.

Interviewer: No, just business suits.

Linda Stasi: No, I have no idea.

Interviewer: It was Marla, Marla's mother --

Linda Stasi: No, just Donald, Marla, and me as far as I remember. I don't remember her parents. It was just the three of us as far as I remember. But it was a very long time ago. Did you get the clip I sent you?

Interviewer: I did. I mean one sort of a bigger picture question I'm interested in answering for readers is just why and how Donald Trump in New York and then in America in the late '80s and '90s became somebody a public fascination whose romantic dalliances, comings and goings were covered here like folks in Britain would cover royalty?

Linda Stasi: It's very interesting. I thought about that a lot. There are three tabloid people in history that I know of in my lifetime that absolutely should never have been loved and adored by the public and are: John Gotti, who was a killer, who's loved and adored; Donald Trump, who's a bizarre rich guy who lives in a golden palace. His wife sits on a golden throne for pictures; and the Kardashians, who have no substance. These are all people who are loved and adored, when in fact, they're the kind of people that should be hated. There's absolutely no understanding of why, but they are. I think I know at least with John Gotti and with Donald Trump, they were real New York characters. We have very few of them left because the tabloids and everyone else destroys real characters. These guys just didn't care. They were sort of born without the gene for shame. They just really make it fun to cover them.

Donald is now in the DNA of New York. He is part of New York. He's not just our bricks and mortar literally. He's in our DNA for better or worse. I personally like the guy. I don't like what he's saying. I don't like what he's become. Covering him now as a political writer is shocking to me. I've known him for many years since 1990. I've never ever known him to be a racist. I've never known him to be a sexist. Yes, the guy likes beautiful women. Yes.

Why would you be a rich guy and not like beautiful women? He likes beautiful women, but I've never known him to be a racist. I mean, truthfully, you couldn't get a public toilet built in New York City if you're a racist. We have so many rules about minority hiring. Every little word of everybody is heard and reheard and reprinted. He's never been a racist. He's the only person in I think United States that has a female CEO of a five-star hotel, and he had a female contractor, chief contractor on the Trump Tower way back when.

Interviewer: Barbara Res.

Linda Stasi: Yes.

Interviewer: One question I wanted to ask, but you kind of touched on earlier about that phone call left with you, was how he would generate coverage up himself in the tabs. I mean that anecdote about the voicemail he left you, would that have been when you were at *News Day* so that would have been before?

Linda Stasi: Yes. That was when I was at *New York News Day*.

Interviewer: So that would've been between Marla and Ivana or between Ivana and Marla, I guess.

Linda Stasi: No. Yes. It was probably after Marla. I don't know, geez. I don't remember because I don't remember it. My brother remembered it. It must've been after --

Interviewer: Well, if that's *News Day*, it would've been



before he married Marla, right?

Linda Stasi: Yeah. I don't even remember the call. My brother reminded me of it. I was in California last week. I saw my brother and he reminded me of it, but I didn't remember it all.

Interviewer: That voicemail that he left, did he identify himself as anyone [cross-talking]?

Linda Stasi: No. He's pretending to be somebody else.

Interviewer: I mean, did he do that aware that you would recognize his voice?

Linda Stasi: No.

Interviewer: He did that intending for you to credulously write, "I have an anonymous tip. Donald was seen around town -"

Linda Stasi: Right. It was said he was at some famous restaurant with a bunch of models. It wasn't that he was cheating on Marla. It was that he was surrounding himself with glamour and just keeping himself out there.

Interviewer: What are the things or other information about himself would he try to get in the tabs? I've heard that before. He would foment rumors about women he was being seen with. What other aspects of his personal life or his comings and goings would he try to get out there?

Linda Stasi: Well, more important than his personal life, he was always very driven. When he became a reality star, he

became relentless in hitting the tabs with information about himself and the show and *Celebrity Apprentice*. He was relentless. Remember, the first year of *Celebrity Apprentice*, it was the biggest show on television. As I said, Donald's always been very fair to me. I asked him if I could spend the day of the finale with him. He let me. We walked all over New York. We did all the things. People were treating him as though the Pope and the president combined were walking the streets.

He was always calling up and saying, "This is the number one show." I want to tell you right now that he'd give us all these tidbits about the show and about how the producers thought it was the greatest show in the history of the world and how it was going to be renewed for the next 150 years, that kind of stuff. Then he switched completely from anything about his personal life to promoting the show, not about real estate, not about his personal life. It was all about the show.

Interviewer: That touched on something else, which is, you know, trying to determine how much of Trump's relentless self-promotion is about business - seeing the financial value of his name in the press versus just a personal desire. He does personally enjoy being written about. It is something he takes pride in because one of his mentors was Roy Cohn, who famously was openly aware of the value of negative press. I talked to

Wayne Barrett, the investigative journalist, who said Cohn once told him, "Wayne, you've written 40 stories about me, not one of them positive. Do you have any idea how much money you've made me?" I wonder when Donald, when he's trying --

Linda Stasi: I never heard that. I never heard that Roy Cohn was a mentor of Donald. I've never heard that. Is it true, really?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Linda Stasi: I've never heard that.

Interviewer: I'm just curious, as someone who dealt with him personally, when he was calling you to try to get you to write about women he was being seen with, was that --?

Linda Stasi: That was just that one tip. That was just that one phone call.

Interviewer: No, I understand. I'm just curious, as a reporter, do you feel like how much of his self-promotion was ego-motivated versus business-motivated?

Linda Stasi: I think to be Donald Trump, you have to be equal parts business and ego. I think they're in equal measure. I mean, he's very sensitive to negative press. He's not somebody who's not sensitive to negative press. He's very sensitive to negative press, but it doesn't stop him. He knows; he also understands the value of any press. But he's very sensitive to it and I think he can be vindictive about it.

Recently, I would say, I had to have foot surgery and I've written some negative stuff about him with the presidential campaign. I've had foot surgery and my phone rang as I was in the doctor's office and I was about to get the stitches out of my foot. My phone rang and it came up it said Donald Trump. I'm thinking to myself, hmm, stitch removal without anesthesia or pick up this phone. I went for the stitch removal. And then I called him back and I said, what is it? He didn't answer. Rhona answered and she said, "Well, he's not here right now." I said, "I know he's there right now. He just called me 20 minutes ago." She said, "No, he's not here right now."

I said, "What does he want?" She said, "He wants to know why you're being mean to him." I said, "Well, even though he's not standing there right behind you, tell him that when he says stupid shit, I'll say he says stupid shit." She said, "Well, he wants me to remind you even though he's not here that he's been very good to you and he went to your book party," and so forth. I said, "Well, I know he's been good to me and I've been good to him. That does not mean that I am his personal PR person and I don't write his newsletter. I'm a journalist. Even though he's not standing there, you must remind him of that." We've spoken since several times. My newspaper has gone after him and he doesn't like that. So we're sort of not on speaking terms these days.

Interviewer: That is another thing I'm curious about, which is how genuinely offended and harmed he is by negative coverage. When he sends out these vindictive letters attacking people, is that just a ploy to generate more publicity for himself, or is he genuinely upset and injured when he sees that?

Linda Stasi: He's genuinely offended. He's genuinely hurt. It does not harm him in any way. You can see that. It doesn't. I think if you want my analysis of how this happened, I've known him for a very long time. I don't think that he actually thought it would get this far.

I think Donald knows how to win. He really knows how to win. That's what he knows how to do. And he looked at the situation and he said, hmm, how can I ruffle some feathers, how can I get a lot of publicity, and who is not being addressed. Okay, it's all these guys. Nobody has the nerve to actually talk to these guys. And he did. He said things that appealed to those guys. I don't think he actually realized that he would become this monster and now he is that person. Now what? Now, he can't not be that person. I believe if he gets elected, he won't be that person. He's a dealmaker, that's what he does. I don't think he'll be that person if he gets elected. If he is that person when he gets elected, God help us.

Interviewer: One of the other things that just strikes me as I read the coverage of him and the fact that he does openly

invite you down to talk to him an hour after his daughter's birth.

Linda Stasi: No, I invited myself.

Interviewer: Well, but he consented to it. He is so available to journalists and so accessible and so happy to let them come and check out his apartment and spend time with them. I'm curious if journalists are his really closest confidants, if you guys get as close as anyone really does.

Linda Stasi: Yes. I mean, I don't know what his personal life is. I'm sure his wife is much closer to him than any of us will ever be. But I think that that's probably true. I mean, he doesn't tell us what's deep in his heart or what he's really feeling. He'd tell us what he wants out there. You can't say we're confidants. Well, he tells us the perception of what he wants out there. I don't know that there is anything else. I don't know. Maybe that's all there is.

Interviewer: Is there anything else we didn't touch on? Particularly, I mentioned in any other specific anecdotes of how he would generate coverage about himself, so that voice message is a great one.

Linda Stasi: When my book came out, *The Sixth Station*, it's a novel. It came out two years ago. I invited him to my book party. He called me up and he said, "Do I really have to go to this?" I said, "Yeah, you really have to go to it." So

he came to it. He generated more publicity for himself than for my book, but it was great. He actually stood there and he said, "This is the greatest book I ever read." It was on every news station in the world. At that point, he wasn't running for anything. I mean the man is a magnet. And he did me a real solid so it becomes a columnist conundrum. Then how do you write negative about somebody who's done you solid? Well, you have to. That's the story of Donald Trump. He's not a bad guy. I don't know how he turned out to seem like a bad guy.

Interviewer: Just on a day-to-day basis, I'm just curious, if you were working, writing something about Donald and you called him, how long will it take to hear back from him?

Linda Stasi: Usually, he'd call me back within an hour, not so much now.

Interviewer: The other thing that strikes me is just I think that it's savvy of him and one reason he has been able to get great press in addition to some negative press over the years is because he's just so eminently available. To journalists, that's a --

Linda Stasi: Gold.

Interviewer: Right. The contrast between him and other political candidates is so striking. You want to talk to Hillary, wait a year or two and you might get an opportunity, whereas, Donald will call you back in 45 minutes.

Linda Stasi: Right. And that hasn't really changed. Except for me, it's changed because obviously he doesn't like the coverage he's getting from my newspaper. [Indiscernible] saying this and we've known each other a long time and I'll always be fair, but I can understand. I can certainly understand that he's angry. That's just the way it rolls. But he is -- and I hope that should he become president, then he'll keep -- he's changed the rule all along. So maybe he'll change the rules should he become president and still be available. I doubt it because it's almost impossible, but who knows.

Interviewer: Well, Linda, that covers pretty much all the basic stuff on it. Is there anything else we didn't talk about you think I should know?

Linda Stasi: No, but if I remember anything I'll let you know. If you remember anything just email me and I'll answer you.

Interviewer: I really appreciate you making time on your vacation. Enjoy Punta Cana and get some rest.

Linda Stasi: Thank you.

Interviewer: It's good talking to you.

Linda Stasi: Bye.

Interviewer: Bye.

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